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ABSTRACT

The Director of Evaluation Services of a mid-sized urban school district describes her job exchange experiences as an assistant principal in a junior high school. The background of the writer and description of the district, evaluation training in the district and returning to the field, and how evaluation fits are discussed. The purposes of the job exchange included providing on site evaluation training to building staff; providing the school administrator with evaluation supervision experience; providing the director an opportunity to view field use of evaluation methodologies and products; and the opportunity to assess problems of a particular school and developing strategies to resolve them. The administrators involved in the exchange returned to their respective positions at the end of the year. They agreed that their assignments had been a valuable personal and professional growth experience. The evaluation methodologies used at schools and those supported by central administration are related. However, there is a wide variation in perspective concerning what is of importance to school based personnel as contrasted to central administration personnel. (DWH)

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TRAINING THE EVALUATION EXPERT: AN EVALUATOR RETURNS TO THE FIELD

This paper describes the experiences of an Evaluator for the Lansing School District, a middle-sized urban district, when she was a part of a one-year job exchange as an assistant principal for instruction in a junior high school. The paper is not a report of a research project; rather it is antecdotal in nature. It is felt, however, that this is an appropriate topic for a conference such as this because it deals with a unique form of evaluation training. The paper is divided into the following parts: 1) Background of Writer and Description of the District; 2) Evaluation Training in The District; 3) Returning to the Field and How Evaluation Fits; and 4) Summary and Conclusions.

Background of the Writer and Description of the District

A part of this paper is titled "An Evaluator Returns to the Field" and indeed the writer began her career in 1963 as a 7th grade English and Social Studies teacher. After six years of teaching in suburban and urban schools, with a two-year hiatus at Michigan State University for doctoral work in teacher education, a career change took place. In 1971, the writer accepted a position with the newly emerging Office of Evaluation Services. This career shift was not planned. In point of fact, the intent of the doctoral work was for training to become a supervisor of student teachers, a far cry from evaluation and research. Most of this writer's evaluation and research skills, then, have been learned on the job, as she not only did not intend to enter such a field, but indeed didn't know that school districts had evaluation divisions. The writer learned her job well and through a series of promotions, became the Director in 1977. It should be kept

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in mind that the early 70's was a "golden era" for evaluation. Monies for special programs were coming into urban school districts and one of the strings attached to these grants was strong evaluation components.

Evaluation Training in the District

There are seven functions outlined in the job description for the Lansing School District's Director of Evaluation Services. One function is to "direct the provision of inservice training with regard to evaluation." Over the years, Lansing's evaluation staff have taken the training function seriously. It has always been the philosophy of the Office that the best evaluators are those who are also program implementators. Principals, project directors, parents, teachers and support staff, are encouraged to play a major role in evaluation design and implementation. Many of the activities undertaken have been traditional in nature, i.e., presentations to teachers, parents, principals in small and large group presentations, provision of graduate level classes, and special assignments for teachers in the evaluation office.

A non-traditional, unique, training opportunity was offered to the Director when she was approached in spring of 1980 to consider a one-year job exchange with the assistant principal for instruction of a junior high school. Several reasons for the exchange were offered:

1) to provide on-site evaluation training to a building staff;

2) to provide a school-based administrator with evaluation supervision experience;

3) to provide the Director, who had been stationed downtown for nearly a decade, a chance to see how evaluation methodologies and products are used in the field, and

4) to help sort out some site specific problems such as assessing why this particular school had a poor community reputation, and to develop strategies to change that view.

Returning to the Field - How Evaluation Fits

In order to discuss what really happened during the year's assignment, it might be best to go back to the purposes that were offered when the exchange was first discussed, and to assess whether or not those purposes were met.

TO PROVIDE ON-SITE EVALUATION TRAINING TO BUILDING STAFF

This purpose was probably met, to a degree, but it was very non-systematic. In reality, the majority of time, even though assigned to supervise instruction, was spent in student management. (One of the problems with the reputation of the school was that of "poor student discipline.") If one subscribes to an extremely generalized definition of evaluation (i.e., information gathered for purposes of decision making) then the modeling aspect of the assignment did provide evaluation training to building staff. For example, five lunch periods of approximately 30 minutes apiece, fed 1200 students. A quick visit to any lunch period made it clear that the management of the cafeteria was in dissaray. Lunchroom aides rough-housed with the kids, administrators were visibly absent, students spilled over into instructional areas, fights broke out and the tone of the cafeteria set the tone for the rest of the day. It did not take a Ph.D. in evaluation to assess a major need, nor were the suggestions this writer made esoteric. What it took was a determination to require lunchroom aides to do their jobs, to require students to have good manners, and for the administrative team to be visible in the cafeteria and be

willing to monitor staff and student behavior. How did we find out if the interventions were successful? Very simple. When administrators were willing to be visible, fewer cafeteria problems occurred. When aides and administrators did not permit students to leave trash on tables, the students in the next lunch period did not walk into a messy area and therefore behaved more appropriately.

As in any good evaluation design, unanticipated outcomes could be found. If the food was good, students were busy eating and usually were not "acting out." When RIF was around, many students spent their lunch period reading their newly acquired books meaning that the cafeteria was finally seen as a place where one could set down important posessions.

TO PROVIDE A SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR WITH EVALUATION SUPERVISION EXPERIENCE

This purpose certainly was met. The assistant principal who moved downtown did indeed gain evaluation/supervision experience. The author maintained her title of Director of Evaluation Services and was kept apprised and/or asked about policy decisions; however, the press of day-to-day activities in the junior high assignment caused this writer to become appropriately unconcerned about what was happening in the department in which she had played a major role for ten years.

TO PROVIDE THE DIRECTOR, WHO HAD BEEN A CENTRAL ADMINISTRATOR FOR SEVERAL YEARS, WITH A CHANCE TO SEE HOW EVALUATION METHODOLOGIES, AND PRODUCTS, ARE USED IN THE FIELD

One of the major "tales of woe" of many evaluators is that no-one makes use of evaluation information in order to improve programs. While, from this experience, it is agreed that there is not a great amount of

daily interface between central administration and local schools, and that is probably perfectly appropriate, evaluators should take heart at the amount of use their products do get, although not necessarily in the way they may have intended. Some examples that this writer saw were:

1) The analysis of summary test information in such a way as to determine a grade level specific problem rather than a total building problem.

2) The analysis of individual test scores in order to provide special programs for low skill readers, with frequent monitoring of their progress.

3) The use of suspension report information to determine what categories of suspensions were problems.

4) The development of a method to stop the movement of minority youngsters from enriched classes to less rigorous classes.

Each of the above examples represent a modification of an evaluation office product; one which was indeed used for program improvement purposes.

TO HELP SORT OUT SOME SITE-SPECIFIC PROBLEMS, SUCH AS ASSESSING WHY THIS PARTICULAR SCHOOL HAD A POOR COMMUNITY REPUTATION, AND TO DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO CHANGE THAT VIEW

Whether or not this writer indeed did help sort out problems that seemed to be specific to that school, is indeed questionable. Part of the inability to answer this question is caused by two factors: 1) the need to be absent from the school setting for some major periods of time because of the very sudden and very serious illness of a family member, thereby not allowing for continuity of effort, and 2) the, either related or unrelated, outcome at the conclusion of the assignment that resulted in the transfer of the principal and one other assistant principal, and the replacement of another assistant

principalship with a former elementary principal. Depending on your point of view, these administrative changes could be seen as a real "sort-out" of site specific problems. While the writer is generally supportive of the changes, she does not delude herself into believing she had the power to cause the changes.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As planned from the beginning, this writer resumed her position as Director of the Office of Evaluation Services. The woman who was downtown for a year returned to an assistant principalship at a different junior high school. It was necessary that each person return to the their original assignment so that others would be willing to take on what appears to be a "high risk" venture. People need to know that indeed an exchange will not be permanent. Each of the individuals involved in the exchange felt that it was an invaluable growth experience both personally and professionally. This writer found the assignment challenging but do-able, and at most times, actually fun.